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SUBJECT: SLOVENIA: PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS SNAPSHOT

Ref: Ljubljana 513

Summary

¶1. (U) Slovenia's Presidential election will take place this Sunday, October 21. The State Electoral Commission has confirmed the candidacies of seven citizens. The top two finishers will go to a second round on November 11 if neither garners over 50 percent of the vote. Polls still predict European Parliamentarian Lojze Peterle to make it to the second round, although he might lose in the second round to his opponent, likely to be former UN high-level official Danilo Tuerk, but possibly former Central Bank Governor Mitja Gaspari. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (SBU) While the candidates have been holding debates and campaigning across Slovenia, these elections are not attracting a huge amount of national, much less international, attention. The President of the Republic of Slovenia, elected for a five year term and for a maximum of two consecutive terms, is its Head of State and the Commander-in-Chief of the Defense Forces of Slovenia. Everybody expects the elections to be free and fair, although there has been concern about ballots distributed to Slovenian voters living abroad.

First the State Electoral Commission sent ballots only to Slovene citizens living abroad who had expressed a wish to vote (approx. 5,000). But, after a subsequent closed-door discussion by the Electoral Commission, an additional 50,000 ballots were sent to voters residing abroad. There is a strong belief among Slovene voters that a great majority of votes coming from abroad would be in favor of the right of center candidate Peterle.

¶3. (U) The State Electoral Commission used a lottery to determine the order of candidates on the ballot for the October 21 Presidential elections. It is as follows: 1. Darko Kranjc; 2. Zmago Jelincic; 3. Mitja Gaspari; 4. Danilo Tuerk; 5. Elena Pecaric; 6. Monika Piberl; and 7. Lojze Peterle. The government will set up a press center in Ljubljana on Election Day to cover the elections.

Snapshot of candidates

¶4. (SBU) Darko Kranjc

DATE/PLACE OF BIRTH: 09 May 1975 in Maribor.

POLITICAL PARTY/AFFILIATION: President of the Youth Party of Slovenia (SMS), non-parliamentarian, considered to be center- left.

CONSTITUENCIES: SMS loyalists and possibly fresh voters.

POSITION ON KEY ISSUES:

--PRIVATIZATION - Not very supportive; he would keep the best companies in State hands.

--FOREIGN INVESTMENT - Supports but would give priority to domestic companies.

--FOREIGN POLICY PRIORITIES - Care for environment, withdrawal from NATO, protection of human rights.

PREVIOUS OFFICES HELD: President of SMS since 2004; before that he was president of the Student Organization of Slovenia.

EDUCATION: MA in Social Work.

FAMILY: Not married but has a partner.

OTHER LANGUAGES SPOKEN: English (fluent).

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION OF INTEREST: He spent his childhood in a foster family and is vice-president of the Foster families Association of Slovenia.

15. (SBU) Zmago Jelincic Plemeniti

DATE/PLACE OF BIRTH: 07 January 1948 in Maribor.

POLITICAL PARTY/AFFILIATION: President of the Slovene National Party (SNS), a barely-defined political party that is currently in the opposition.

CONSTITUENCIES: SNS loyalists and other nationalists.

POSITION ON KEY ISSUES:

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--PRIVATIZATION - Supportive, but with Slovene owners.

--FOREIGN INVESTMENT - Supports if it suits him for his personal interests. So, he would support Hit-Harrah's investment if they sponsor construction of aviation museum in Ajdovscina (he is the president of the Aviation Association of Slovenia).

FOREIGN POLICY PRIORITIES - Relations with Croatia and other neighbors.

PREVIOUS OFFICES HELD: President of SNS since its foundation in March 1991; previously he established a pharmaceutical company that closed down after the collapse of former Yugoslavia.

EDUCATION: High school graduate (pharmacy).

FAMILY: Married twice, with two daughters and a son from the first marriage.

OTHER LANGUAGES SPOKEN: English (fluent), Serbian (fluent).

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION OF INTEREST: He is a lifetime member of National Rifle Association of America (NRA) and a member of American Pharmaceutical Association (AphA). He is a strong personality who personifies his party. He and his party strongly opposed Slovene integration into EU, however, he often changes his beliefs according to his personal benefits.

16. (SBU) Mitja Gaspari

DATE/PLACE OF BIRTH: 25 November 1951 in Ljubljana.

POLITICAL PARTY/AFFILIATION: Not affiliated with, but supported by the Liberal Democrats of Slovenia (LDS) (in the opposition).

CONSTITUENCIES: LDS loyalists and some bankers.

POSITION ON KEY ISSUES:

--PRIVATIZATION - Supports gradual approach.

--FOREIGN INVESTMENT - Strongly supports foreign investments to increase competition.

--FOREIGN POLICY PRIORITIES - EU presidency, Western Balkans, neighbors.

PREVIOUS OFFICES HELD: Governor of the Bank of Slovenia, Minister of Finance, employee of the World Bank in Washington where he lived for one year (1991 - 1992).

EDUCATION: MD in Economics.

FAMILY: Married.

OTHER LANGUAGES SPOKEN: English (fluent), Serbian (fluent).

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION OF INTEREST: Gaspari is expert in finance and banking and one of the ones most responsible for Slovenia's successful entrance into Euro zone. Gaspari is currently placing third in the polls. He is widely respected, but not viewed as being in touch with the common Slovenian.

17. (SBU) Danilo Tuerk

DATE/PLACE OF BIRTH: 19 February 1952 in Maribor.

POLITICAL PARTY/AFFILIATION: Not affiliated with, but supported by the center-left opposition parties of: Social Democrats (SD), Zares - New Politics, as well as the Democratic Party of Pensioners of Slovenia (DeSUS), which is in the coalition.

CONSTITUENCIES: SD, Zares, DeSUS loyalists, and intellectuals.

POSITION ON KEY ISSUES:

--PRIVATIZATION - Supports gradual approach.

--FOREIGN INVESTMENT - Supports foreign investments.

--FOREIGN POLICY PRIORITIES - EU presidency, protection of human rights, Western Balkans, neighbors, environment.

PREVIOUS OFFICES HELD: Assistant to the Secretary General of the UN for Political Affairs, Slovene Ambassador to UN in New York, Professor of International Law at Ljubljana University.

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EDUCATION: PhD in International Law.

FAMILY: Married, with daughter.

OTHER LANGUAGES SPOKEN: English (fluent), Serbian (fluent).

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION OF INTEREST: He is a Slovene diplomat with great experience. Notably, he led the Slovene Mission to the UN in New York during Slovenia's presidency of the Security Council in 1999. He has been gaining recently in the polls, but he and Gaspari will likely split the center-left vote.

18. (SBU) Elena Pecaric

DATE/PLACE OF BIRTH: 6 October 1971 in Ljubljana.

POLITICAL PARTY/AFFILIATION: Not affiliated

CONSTITUENCIES: Partial support from organizations of disabled.

POSITION ON KEY ISSUES:

--PRIVATIZATION - Supports gradual approach.

--FOREIGN INVESTMENT - Supports foreign investments.

--FOREIGN POLICY PRIORITIES - Protection of human rights, protection

of environment.

OFFICES HELD: Currently she is the President of the Association for Theory and Culture of Handicap, where she is responsible for project "Independent Life of Disabled."

EDUCATION: BA in Philosophy and in Sociology of Culture.

FAMILY: Not married but has a partner.

OTHER LANGUAGES SPOKEN: English.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION OF INTEREST: She is the first among the disabled to run for president in independent Slovenia. Some organizations for the disabled support her candidacy as a showcase, to demonstrate that the disabled can enter politics actively. Because of internal disputes in the Slovene Association of Disabled, some are very negative about her exposure to the public.

19. (SBU) Monika Piberl

DATE/PLACE OF BIRTH: 4 January 1950 in Maribor.

POLITICAL PARTY/AFFILIATION: President of the Voice of Women of Slovenia, a non-parliamentary party.

CONSTITUENCIES: Members of her party and local supporters.

POSITION ON KEY ISSUES:

--PRIVATIZATION - Supports.

--FOREIGN INVESTMENT - Supports.

--FOREIGN POLICY PRIORITIES - Support for peace, promotion of Slovenia as a "country of honest, hard working" people.

PREVIOUS OFFICES HELD: She worked for a private company and after retirement established her political party.

EDUCATION: High school graduate.

FAMILY: Married with two children.

OTHER LANGUAGES SPOKEN: N/A.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION OF INTEREST: She established the Voice of Women of Slovenia to counter the announcement made by a Labor Minister in (1998) that women would have to work until the age of 65.

10. (SBU) Lojze Peterle

DATE/PLACE OF BIRTH: 5 July 1948 in Cuznja vas Dolenjska.

POLITICAL PARTY/AFFILIATION: member of the New Slovenia (NSi) - basically a Christian Democratic party, which is in the coalition).

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CONSTITUENCIES: All parties from the leading coalition, except DeSUS, have expressed support for his candidacy (SDS, NSi, and SLS).

POSITION ON KEY ISSUES:

--PRIVATIZATION - Supports.

--FOREIGN INVESTMENT - Supports.

--FOREIGN POLICY PRIORITIES - EU presidency, relations with neighbors, Western Balkans.

PREVIOUS OFFICES HELD: He was the first Slovene Prime Minister after Slovenia's first democratic elections in 1990, Foreign

Minister twice, and is currently a member of the European Parliament.

EDUCATION: BA in Geography and History.

FAMILY: Married with three children.

OTHER LANGUAGES SPOKEN: Fluent in English, French, German, Russian, Italian, Serbian, and Croatian.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION OF INTEREST: He was the Prime Minister of Slovenia right after independence and won a battle with cancer some years ago.

Comment

¶11. (SBU) There are three frontrunners for the position: Lojze Peterle, Mitja Gaspari, and Dr. Danilo Tuerk. According to public opinion polls conducted by different media, and also according to some political commentators, two things are more or less clear: Peterle will win in the first round, but not with an absolute majority, so there will be a second round of voting scheduled for November 11. In the second round Tuerk or Gaspari, who are both considered politically oriented more left than right, have better chances to win significant votes from each other in a second round against Peterle. So, the percentage Peterle gets in the first round will be key. If he gets less than 40 percent he will have serious trouble winning in the second round. END COMMENT.

COLEMAN